

DECLASSIFIED
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E.O. 12958, as amended
October 11, 2007

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DDK - [unclear]

Dacca, Bangladesh

August 27, 1973

[REDACTED]

Peter D. Constable, Esquire
Country Director, NEA/PAB
Department of State
Washington

Dear Peter:

This letter is about U.S. military supply policy toward Bangladesh. It is stimulated by your letter of August 13. Since receiving your letter, I have discussed the subject in varying detail with all elements of the country team. The following commentary reflects a consensus, but I have not attempted to elaborate a formally cleared country team document. Not all members of the country team, after all, are privy to all the information we have on the subject.

Our basic approach begins with the conviction that for us to begin supplying any military equipment at all to the Bangladesh would entail a fundamental change in our posture or in others' perceptions of our posture. The Bengalees would certainly see it that way and so would also the Soviets and the Indians. What sort of ripostes the Soviets and/or the Indians might concoct is a matter of conjecture. They almost certainly would complicate the atmosphere for our aid and USIS programs. In short, is it worth the risk of trouble to get ourselves into the military supply act for the sake of "peanuts" in the terms of U.S. sales?

The next question we address is whether Bangladesh armed forces really need the items on their shopping list? Their manner of approaching us suggests that they simply are indulging in comparison shopping. The lack of ministerial or secretary-of-ministry overtures argues against the notion that a refusal on our part would be taken as an

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unfriendly gesture. We are left with the surmise that a substantial motive behind the shopping excursion is a concern for the morale of Bengalee military officers. There should be some more compelling motive to justify the U.S. Government's getting into the military supply activity in Bangladesh.

Fighter aircraft fall into a special category. There is no reason that we know of for Bangladesh to have fighter aircraft at all. We have the distinct impression that the Soviet MIG's were forced on Mujib and that they constitute an embarrassment to the Mujib Government. How are the Bengalees going to pay for the MIG's? It is all too likely that no one knows. Perhaps the Soviets have not even dictated the terms yet, but it is almost certain that Bangladesh will have to pay. One of these days some maverick member of Parliament could be asking these questions openly. As we have reported earlier, my Australian colleague intends to see that questions are raised sooner rather than later.

We in the Embassy assume that there is no legitimate requirement for MIG's. Therefore no requirement to make the old F-86's airworthy either. On the contrary, I can think of many arguments for keeping the F-86's grounded. At a time when the chanceries of the world are being turned inside out to get more food for Bangladesh, when we have not yet delivered on our promises of edible oil, for example, what have we to gain by licensing spare parts for F-86's -- when, so far as we know, the only Bengalees who care whether the F-86's fly or not are the pilots who trained in them in erstwhile Pakistan?

In classical War College terms, where is the threat? Territorially, Bangladesh is, to use James Michener's word, "encapsulated" by India. An external threat to Bangladesh is first of all a threat to India, or a threat from India. Do our strategic planners conceive of a threat to Bangladesh apart from a threat to India? Unless and until they do, we should hesitate to get involved in supplying military items to Bangladesh.

In short, the country team is not ready at this time to recommend any relaxation of the arms embargo to Bangladesh.

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The two majors who came to see Jay Freres might never come back again. If they do, I propose to tell them that the embargo continues to apply and that, in order to seek an exception, the Embassy would need to have a request from the EDC at the minister level. I would see no harm in providing the technical data as proposed in Cleve Fuller's July 30 letter.

If we are utterly out of phase with NEA thinking on this subject, do let me know. Meanwhile we operate on the assumption that U.S. interests in Bangladesh are strictly humanitarian. The ambience here is tricky enough even in the humanitarian field. Let us not make it more difficult unless there are compelling reasons for change.

On the related subject of Bangladesh's equipment needs for internal security, we are preparing a separate letter, which ought to be ready for next week's pouch.

Sincerely,

Daniel O. Newberry
Charge d'Affaires a.i.

cc: Mr. Sober
Charge d'Affaires
Islamabad

Minister Counselor
New Delhi

CHARGE: DNewberry:mh